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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: MEETING WITH GHANA'S NEW MINISTER OF WOMEN AND
CHILDREN AFFAIRS: TRAFFICKING FOCUS

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED, PLEASE HANDLE ACCORDINGLY

1. (U) Summary: On February 16, A/DCM and PolChief paid a courtesy call on Alima Mahama, Ghana's new Minister of Women and Children Affairs, to inform her about USG interest in passage of a trafficking in persons law. She said the ministry had recently submitted its comments on the draft TIP bill to the Attorney General. She discussed her priorities as minister and addressed issues of child labor and the pending domestic violence bill. End summary.

Trafficking in Persons

2. (SBU) PolChief noted the USG's strong interest in seeing Ghana pass a trafficking in persons (TIP) law before April, 2005. Ghana's Tier 1 status could be affected by failure to pass such a law, he said. Minister Mahama said "we must keep Tier 1" and pointed out that her ministry had recently submitted its comments on the TIP bill to the Attorney General. Moving the bill to parliament depended on getting the AG to focus on the bill as a priority, which she would encourage him to do. Mahama did not expect the law to be controversial, either with the AG or in parliament, but opined it would be difficult to get a bill passed before this session of parliament ends in late March.

Ministry's Priorities

3. (U) Minister Mahama said she had developed a Gender and Children's Policy and would be working with other ministries to develop their capacity on gender issues. Her priorities will track the priorities President Kufuor detailed in his recent State of the Nation address: human resource development, private sector development, and good governance.

Human Resource Development: The ministry will promote two years of preschool for all children, encourage girls' secondary school education, and support health programs which target women and children (she cited cancer screening and insecticide-treated bed nets).

Private Sector Development: She will promote programs to support rural women with bank loans and by encouraging microcredit and microenterprises. She wants to support businesswomen and plans to establish women and child centers in each of Ghana's ten regions.

Good Governance: Her ministry will work with other ministries for programs that benefit men and women. She will pursue a Domestic Violence bill that is enforceable and acceptable within Ghana's cultural norms. Her ministry will continue with ongoing sensitization and consultation efforts throughout the country to gain more buy-in for the bill. (Note: this bill has been very controversial, generating a debate about how to best tackle the issue of marital rape. End note.)

Child Labor

4. (U) PolChief asked about the ministry's approach to child labor issues, noting this is a USG priority. She said the ministry is working with the ILO, International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the Department of Social Welfare to develop an anti-child labor strategy. The ministry's Chief Director (its top bureaucrat) Emmanuel Mensah Quaye noted that child labor has been an issue regarding Ghana's cocoa farms. He was clear that Ghana does not condone child labor on cocoa farms but opined that most such child labor came from children helping their families and getting some training on weekends, in a non-exploitative manner. The minister concurred.

Comment

5. (SBU) Mahama was engaging and helpful. When PolChief

mentioned TIP issues, she got up, grabbed a notebook (despite being surrounded by four notetakers) and took careful notes. She stressed her interest in women and business. She and the Chief Director were disappointing in their dismissive response on child labor in the cocoa industry and failure to mention child labor in other sectors. Mahama said her experience at the Center for Women and Politics at Rutgers University while a Humphrey Fellow in 1999-2000 made her think about getting into politics. She hopes to engage USG officials when she attends a meeting next week in New York of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, of which Ghana is a member. After the meeting, Chief Director Quaye, who has not been helpful to us in the past, said he would help push the Attorney General (reportedly a close friend) to submit the TIP bill to parliament.

Bio

16. (U) Alima Mahama (58) is an ethnic Mamprusi and a Muslim and comes from the Northern region of Ghana. Prior to becoming a minister, she was Deputy Minister for Trade, Industry and President's Special Initiatives (2003-2005) and Deputy Minister for Local Government and Rural Development (2001-2003). From 1987-2001, she worked as a Senior Planner, Gender and Development Coordinator at the Northern Regional Rural Integrated Program, and worked previously as Director of Maalizaali, an NGO focused on capacity building of local government institutions, gender analysis and planning, human rights, and training for women. She has a B.A. in Law and Sociology from the University of Ghana, Legon, a law degree from Ghana Law School, and an M.A. in Development Studies from the Institute of Social Studies, The Hague. In 1990-91, Mahama studied in Canada on a Government of Canada Pearson Fellowship Award, and in 1999-2000 she was a Hubert Humphrey Fellow at Rutgers University, where she studied Urban Policy Planning and Women's Studies. She is not married.

YATES